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Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
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HSBC Hyderabad Bird Race: Sunday, 2nd March 2025, 5.30AM: Flag off from Tourism Plaza Hotel, Begumpet. Event Coordinator(s): Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 97388-40070); Gokul Krishna Addanki (Mobile: 99453-46585); Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 94409-10967); Sathwik Reddy Nimma (Mobile: 99858-07186)

This is the 17th edition of the HSBC Hyderabad Bird Race, an annual event where bird lovers form teams and get involved in the dawn-to-dusk frenzy of spotting and recording bird species in and around the twic cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The event is open to all – members and non-members, birders and non-birders – so invite all your friends who would be interested in spending the day out with birds. More details will be shared on email.

Trip Report: Ananthagiri Hills, Vikarabad, December 01, 2024

Preethi Velagapudi

White-naped Woodpecker (Photo: Aditya Rao)

My journey to the lush hills of Ananthagiri began with an unexpected discovery. I was to stay in Hyderabad for two months and had searched for local birdwatching spots in the area. I expected to find little in terms of resources since none of my Indian family ever understood my love for birds, but I eventually stumbled upon the Deccan Birders Facebook page. The prospect of spotting new birds with like-minded enthusiasts thrilled me despite the fact I barely knew anything about Hyderabad or the people in it (much less the people I would have to spend my day with).

My love of birds didn't start in the States but rather rural Andhra from observing the koels, babblers, and the crows -- *especially* the crow, a creature I find so clever and captivating. Obviously, Indian birds intrigue me more -- the birds I would see back home in Dallas I could find on any day in the US, but the ones here are much more of novelties. I spent hours poring over their vibrant images, hoping for the day I'd get to spot a Blue-faced Malkoha or an Indian Paradise-flycatcher.

And so, I woke up on a Sunday well before dawn to catch five members of the group at the first checkpoint. Twenty minutes later we were at the second checkpoint to combine with another group for breakfast and small talk. After a 70 km drive to Vikarabad, our group joined an even larger group of forty to ultimately make our final troupe of birders at the trailhead.

Here, Sathwik and the other more senior birders gathered us in a circle. They gave us advice on how to identify birds in the fore, middle, and background; how to identify their location in trees using clock positions; by their colours; and by their sizes as compared to the more common species like sparrows, pigeons, or crows.

I quickly introduced myself to a couple of other birders and was soon taken under the wing of a very enthusiastic senior birder, Anita, who was adept at spotting a bird by the briefest flap of its wings and identifying it with hardly any more information. Of course, the birds here are new to me and I didn't know where to look for certain ones. Beyond that, however, the ones here still seemed harder to spot. Perhaps because of the crowds from the weekend trekkers and temple goers, or the foliage providing them a hideout. In the US, the birds seem more comfortable coming close to humans, and somehow, feel more visible.

Orange-headed Thrush (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Indian Grey Hornbill (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Blue-capped Rock Thrush (Photo: Aditya Rao)

In any case, with Anita's and other birders' help, I spotted precious birds I would have missed on my own, such as the Indian Grey Hornbill, Coppersmith Barbet (gorgeous and with such a phenomenal voice), and the Indian Paradise-flycatcher (I have been dying to see this one for ages!).

Indian Paradise-flycatcher (Photo: Aditya Rao)

By the end of the day, I'd spotted about 37 species. I was tired, but satisfied to have seen so much with the welcoming like-minded people of the Deccan Birders group.

Jacobin Cuckoo (Photo: Ali Hyder)

White-throated Kingfisher (Photo: Ali Hyder)

Large-billed Leaf Warbler (Photo: Aditya Rao)

There were some birds that felt very different from the ones I knew in the States – the Grey Hornbill, for example, has a beak so thick I couldn't think of a similar bird from America. In contrast, the warblers here reminded me of the warblers back home, but I came to know that Old World warblers and New World warblers are not closely related at all. Perhaps they convergently evolved to fill similar ecological niches as their American cousins. It was nice though, to know that the ibises and coots are closely related to the ones back home.

Green Bee-eater (Photo: Ali Hyder)

Indian White-eye (Photo: Aditya Rao)

I also noticed differences in the people watching the birds. Perhaps due to a long history of conservation in the US, it seems more commonplace to spend time with and develop an appreciation for the natural world in the US, unlike in India. Back home, I usually birdwatch with friends or my local Audubon society, the Trinity River Audubon Center of Dallas, who host their birdwalks two to three times a month at their park in southeast Dallas. Oftentimes, it's more casual or inexperienced birders that will join for these guided walks, while the more experienced ones will birdwatch elsewhere by other parks or lakes with their long camera lenses.

In contrast, this birding trip was less guided and many of the birders split apart into smaller exploratory groups. Many of the forty birdwatchers from this day seemed to have plenty more experience under their belts and yet perhaps because of the structure (well-organized trips with the ability to meander on one's own), they're incentivized to stay together. In addition, these trips are far from the city, often an hour or two away. Going against the grain culturally and often putting hours into a trip, I can confidently say that the birders in this group are in some ways more dedicated than the ones I'd gotten to know in the US.

Indian Silverbill (Photo: Ali Hyder)

Indian Blackbird female (Photo: Aditya Rao)

All in all, a good trip. My favourite bird? The Coppersmith Barbet. It made such a melodious sound that absolutely did sound like metalsmithing. So aptly named and colourful, it made me happy.

The list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	42	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*
2	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	43	Black-naped Monarch	*Hypothymis azurea*
3	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	44	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*
4	Painted Spurfowl	*Galloperdix lunulata*	45	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*
5	Grey Francolin	*Ortygornis pondicerianus*	46	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
6	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	47	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*
7	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	48	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
8	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	49	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
9	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	50	Booted Warbler / Sykes's Warbler	*Iduna caligata / Iduna rama*
10	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	51	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*
11	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	52	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
12	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	53	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
13	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	54	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
14	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	55	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
15	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	56	Sulphur-bellied Warbler	*Phylloscopus griseolus*
16	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	57	Green Warbler	*Phylloscopus nitidus*
17	Little Egret / Western Reef Heron	*Egretta garzetta / Egretta gularis*	58	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*
18	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	59	Large-billed Leaf Warbler	*Phylloscopus magnirostris*
19	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	60	Western Crowned Warbler	*Phylloscopus occipitalis*
20	Changeable Hawk Eagle	*Nisaetus cirrhatus*	61	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
21	Shikra	*Tachyspiza badia*	62	Tawny-bellied Babbler	*Dumetia hyperythra*
22	Mottled Wood Owl	*Strix ocellata*	63	Jungle Babbler	*Argya striata*
23	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	64	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
24	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	65	Indian Blackbird	*Turdus simillimus*
25	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	66	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa muttui*
26	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	67	Verditer Flycatcher	*Eumyias thalassinus*
27	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	68	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
28	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*	69	Ultramarine Flycatcher	*Ficedula superciliaris*
29	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	*Yungipicus nanus*	70	Blue-capped Rock Thrush	*Monticola cinclorhyncha*
30	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	*Leiopicus mahrattensis*	71	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
31	White-naped Woodpecker	*Chrysocolaptes festivus*	72	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	*Pachyglossa agilis*
32	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*	73	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
33	Streak-throated Woodpecker	*Picus xanthopygaeus*	74	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
34	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	75	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
35	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*	76	Jerdon's Leafbird	*Chloropsis jerdoni*
36	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	77	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
37	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	*Lalage melanoptera*	78	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
38	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	79	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
39	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	80	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*
40	Spot-breasted Fantail	*Rhipidura albogularis*	81	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
41	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*			

Some other photographs taken during the trip:

Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Black Drongo (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Black-naped Monarch (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Brown-breasted Flycatcher (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Verditer Flycatcher (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Black-naped Monarch female (Photo: Aditya Rao)

Indian Pond Heron (Photo: Ali Hyder)

The group at the outing (Photo courtesy: Ali Hyder)

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

(Contributed by JVD Moorty, New Yorker magazine, Nov 15, 2021)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Malabar Trogon (*Harpactes fasciatus*)

Malabar Trogon immature

(Dandeli, Karnataka, October 31, 2024)

Order:	Trogoniformes
Family:	Trogonidae
Genus:	*Harpactes*
Species:	*H. fasciatus*
Size:	31 cm

Description & distribution: The Malabar Trogon is the smallest of the Trogons seen in India. It is a resident in its range, which extends from Peninsular India south of Gujarat, through the more humid parts of the Western and Eastern Ghats and the hills of western Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka.

Like most Trogons, the Malabar Trogon is sexually dimorphic. The male is very brightly coloured, with its crimson belly separated from the black head, neck and breast by a white border. The back is yellowish-brown, while wings are black with fine white vermiculations. The tail is long and graduated: the central tail-feathers are chestnut with a black tip, with the second and third pairs from the middle having more black than chestnut. The outer three pairs have long white tips. The female does not have the contrasting crimson and black; rather, its head and breast, only slightly darker brown, merge into the olive-brown of the back. The underside is ochre. In both sexes, the bill and orbital area are bluish black, irises are dark brown and feet are pale bluish. Nostrils are protected by tufts of filoplumes. The feet are heterodactyl, a feature unique to the Trogons, with the digits I and II facing back and digits III and IV pointing forward.

Habitat & behaviour: The Malabar Trogon is usually seen singly or in widely separated pairs, in evergreen or moist deciduous forest, and mixed foothills bamboo forest. It is a fast but reluctant flier, preferring mostly to sit quietly, in a bolt upright position, for long periods of time, on tree stumps or low branches, occasionally making agile sallies through the thickets to catch insects. Its diet also includes caterpillars, beetles, cicadas and other insects, besides some leaves and berries. When foraging on bark, they have been observed to use their tails to prop themselves up, akin to woodpeckers. Its call is a series of guttural or purring notes, while the song is an unhurried series of 3-4 *kyau* or *mew* notes. The alarm call is a *churrr*, and a similar call is also used at roosting time. They are not migrants, but in the Nilgiris region, they migrate altitudinally, moving up to higher reaches in summer.

Nesting: The Malabar Trogon breeds mainly between February and June. Its nest is an unlined natural hollow in a low, preferably rotting and hence soft, tree stump inside deep forest. The usual clutch consists of 2-4 roundish, glossy ivory white eggs. Incubation duties are performed by both parents, and they also continue to feed fledged juveniles for up to 6 months.

Local name: The Malabar Trogon is known as *'Kufni chiri'* in Hindi, *'Karna'* in Marathi, *'Kakarne hakki'* in Kannada, *'Theekakka'* ('fire crow') in Malayalam, and *'Loha wannichcha'* in Sinhala.

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For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*